

IBEX NAMES JUDGES FOR 2026 INNOVATION AWARDS

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Winners of Highly Anticipated Program to be Announced at Industry Breakfast

Tampa, FL – The International BoatBuilders' Exhibition and Conference (IBEX) announced today the distinguished list of judges for the 23rd IBEX Innovation Awards Program. Managed by the National Marine Manufacturers Association (NMMA) and independently judged by Boating Writers International (BWI), the program is one of the marine industry's most prestigious honors recognizing manufacturers and suppliers who bring new, innovative products to market.

Each of the six BWI judges comes to IBEX with various technical and boating backgrounds.

The panel of judges for the 2026 IBEX Innovation Awards are:

Ben Stein (Chair): Ben Stein is editor of Panbo.com covering marine technology. He also writes a monthly Getting Technical column for Soundings Trade Only and serves as electronics editor for Power & Motoryacht. Stein chairs the NMMA's Innovation Awards at IBEX and co-chairs the awards at the Discover Boating Miami International Boat Show. Additionally, he is a member of DAME Design Awards jury at Metstrade and chairs the National Marine Electronics Association's new product awards. After 15 years in financial services technology, he left the corporate world to pursue his passion in boating. Stein is a past president of BWI, a USCG 100-Ton Master, and ABYC certified marine electrical technician.

Tim Murphy (Co-Chair): Tim Murphy is the education director for the American Boat & Yacht Council. A contributing editor to BoatUS magazine, and a Cruising World editor-at-Large, Murphy has worked as a marine journalist for more than 35 years. Having directed and judged Cruising World's Boat of the Year program for two decades, he has sea-trialed more than 600 new boats in that time. He co-wrote Fundamentals of Marine Service Technology (ABYC 2012). He is the author of Adventurous Use of the Sea (Seapoint Books, 2022). Murphy holds a USCG 100-Ton Master's license.

Pim Van Hemmen: Pim Van Hemmen is the former deputy editor of Soundings magazine. In a previous life he spent 25 years in the newspaper industry and another decade as a nautical photographer. He is a lifelong boater and when he isn't photographing or writing about boats, he can be found on the water aboard his Zodiac RIB.

Tony Esposito: A 30-year marine industry veteran, Tony Esposito is a contributor to speedonthewater.com and U.S. Correspondent for International Boat Industry (IBI), following a management career with Mercury Marine, Mercury Racing and Custom Marine, Inc.

Steve Davis: Steve Davis started sailing at seven years old and has raced sailboats for more than 20 years. After earning his USCG 100-Ton Master's license, he served as a charter captain in the British and U.S. Virgin Islands and as a delivery captain along the Pacific Coast. He is the former managing editor of Dockwalk, a superyacht captain and crew publication, editor-in-chief of Southern Boating, and has previously judged the IBEX Innovation Awards. Davis is currently president of BWI.

Steve Mitchell: Steve Mitchell is a year-round Pacific Northwest cruiser aboard his 50-foot steel trawler and a lifelong boater with experience in both sail and power. With decades in the technology industry and over 20 years of hands-on experience designing and installing marine electronics, electrical systems, and optimized solutions for customers, he blends technical expertise with real-world cruising insight. As founder of SeaBits, he tests, reviews, and consults on the latest marine technology, and contributes to 48° North and other boating publications.

"Serving as an Innovation Awards judge provides a unique opportunity to see the newest technologies and product developments before they reach the market," said Ben Stein, Chair, Innovation Awards. "The judging process is thorough and collaborative, and it reflects the depth of expertise our panel brings to every category. I'm grateful for the commitment of this outstanding group of judges and excited to evaluate this year's entries and recognize the innovations that stand out among an exceptionally competitive field."

This year's program is anticipated to once again include a record number of entrants. Exhibitors interested in submitting their products can enter using the entry form found in the Exhibitor Resource Center. Entries must be submitted by August 18. Product entries will be on display along Innovation Way, located on the second-floor rotunda throughout the days of the Show, October 6-8, 2026.

The awards will be presented at the annual Industry Breakfast, from 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, October 6, at the JW Marriott Tampa Water Street, Tampa Bay Ballroom. Sponsored by AWLGRIP North America, Honda Marine, Interlux Yacht Finishes, Sea Hawk Paints, Suzuki Marine and Tides Marine Inc., the Industry Breakfast serves as the kickoff to IBEX.

"The Innovation Awards are one of the defining moments of IBEX, recognizing the ingenuity and engineering excellence that continue to move the marine industry forward," said Mary Velline, IBEX Show Director. "Every year, exhibitors introduce products that solve real-world challenges, improve the boating experience and push the boundaries of what's possible. We look forward to celebrating the companies whose

ideas and technologies are helping shape the next generation of recreational boating products.”

Following last year’s success, IBEX is bringing the Innovation Meet + Greet back to Innovation Way on Tuesday, October 6, from 2:30–3:00 p.m. Attendees can connect with Innovation Award entrants and winners, explore the latest industry advancements, and meet the teams behind the technologies shaping the future of recreational boating. Join us for a toast to the innovators and ideas driving the industry forward.

Registration is open for this year’s Show, set to take place at the Tampa Convention Center, October 6-8, 2026. Visitors and accredited press can [click here](#) for registration. For exhibitors looking to add booth staff, [click here](#) for exhibitor registration. The Industry Breakfast sells out every year, and tickets are available through the registration process – it is recommended to purchase them soon.

To stay informed, subscribe to the IBEX email newsletter and follow IBEX across social channels (IBEX LinkedInFacebook, Instagram, and X). For year-round insights into the products, companies, and technologies shaping the industry, visit IBEX 365 and Professional BoatBuilder, the IBEX Technical Journal.

For tickets and more information on IBEX’s full slate of educational opportunities, visit www.ibexshow.com.

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About the International BoatBuilders’ Exhibition & Conference (IBEX):
IBEX (International BoatBuilders’ Exhibition & Conference) is the marine industry’s leading B2B platform connecting professionals to the technical knowledge, products, innovation, and community shaping the future of boatbuilding and marine technology. Guided by a mission to bring the industry together and accelerate growth, IBEX delivers value year-round through its annual event, Professional BoatBuilder, The IBEX Technical Journal, and its expanding digital platform. For more information, please visit www.ibexshow.com.